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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/WE AND PRM/ANE

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TAGS: PREF KPAL PREL SP EUN

SUBJECT: SPAIN IRKED ON UNRWA ADVISORY COMMISSION

NEGOTIATIONS

Classified By: Political Counselor Kathy Fitzpatrick; reason 1.4 (B).

¶1. (C) MFA desk officer for the Middle East Eva Martinez requested a meeting with poloff on June 8 to relay Spain's frustration with the ongoing discussions on the expansion of the UNRWA Advisory Commission. Martinez said Spain had been surprised to learn at the May 17-19 major donors informal meeting in Amman that negotiations on the expansion of the Advisory Commission were already well advanced. She said Spain is very interested in becoming one of the new members of the Advisory Commission, primarily because of Spain's long history of providing humanitarian aid to the Palestinians. According to Martinez, Spain is fully on board with other donors on the need to improve transparency and give the major donors a bigger say in the activities of the UNRWA.

¶2. (C) Martinez said Spain was disappointed to learn in Amman that, under the draft criteria established by the working group managing the expansion of the Advisory Commission, Spain would fail to be included among the new members of the Advisory Commission. Specifically, Spain would not meet the guideline that a donor would have to have contributed at least \$5 million over the last three years in order to gain a seat on the Commission. Martinez noted that Spanish contributions over the last three years were: \$3.4 million (2003), \$5.4 million (2004), and \$5.1 million (2005). She said these figures excluded contributions by Spanish regional governments, which she said totaled approximately \$400,000 in 2004 and would be near the same amount in 2005.

¶3. (C) The Spanish delegates relayed to the Swedish delegate who was managing the working group planning the Advisory Commission expansion Spain's frustration at falling just short of the criteria for inclusion. Martinez said the Swedish delegation indicated that they would like to include Spain, but wanted to be sure that all new entrants met objective (vice political) criteria. According to Martinez, the Swedish delegate said the USG was particularly interested that the PLO delegation remain observers rather than full members of the Advisory Commission. Martinez said Spain understood this and agreed on the need to avoid establishing political criteria since that could open the door to countries who, for whatever reason, might obstruct the work of the Commission. Martinez said that a member of the USG delegation at Amman had made clear to Ambassador Pombo (the Spanish delegation leader) that the USG, like Sweden, had no objection to Spain's participation in the Advisory Commission.

¶4. (C) Martinez said the Spanish delegation left Amman with assurances from the Swedish delegation that the Advisory Commission expansion working group would develop new objective criteria and that Sweden would send Madrid within 10 days a new draft UN resolution defining the terms of the Advisory Commission expansion. When Spain did not hear from the Swedish delegation for three weeks, they checked with the Swedish Embassy. The Swedish Embassy informed Martinez June 7 that new criteria for participation in the Advisory Commission had been established. They reportedly told Martinez that under the new provisions, a donor had to have made a contribution of at least \$5 million to UNRWA over the two previous years instead of over the last three years, a shift that, if approved, would have allowed Spain to joint the Advisory Commission. However, Martinez said the Swedish Embassy had indicated to her that the USG had requested that the \$5 million provided over the last two years be core contributions, not the total payments by a country (including to emergency appeals). Since some of the Spanish \$5 million contributed to UNRWA in each of the last two years was made in response to emergency appeals and not as a core contribution, this criterion would effectively bar Spain from the Advisory Commission.

¶5. (C) Martinez said Spain understands that it is not contributing to UNRWA on a scale comparable to the USG, the UK, or Sweden, but insisted that its contributions are on an upward trajectory. More importantly, Martinez said Spain would be the only country with a significant diplomatic/aid profile in the region to be left out of the Advisory Commission. She said it was especially irksome when it was

her understanding that some countries that will qualify under the new recommended guidelines don't want to be in the Advisory Commission while Spain definitely wants to participate (she cited Canada, evidently on the basis of a conversation with the Swedish delegation). Martinez said Spain agreed with the need for objective criteria for membership in the Advisory Commission, but was left with the impression that boundaries had been drawn up that specifically left Spain out. She argued that it would be equally objective, for example, to establish that the 15 largest contributors (including historic donor members) could be members of the Advisory Commission. Martinez asked that poloff investigate whether there would be any flexibility on this issue on the part of the USG.

16. (U) Post would welcome guidance on how to respond to the MFA's points on this issue.

MANZANARES